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Lee, Elisha

Why we want to see Baltimore grow

Baltimore, Md.

1922

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Why We Want to See Baltimore Grow

Our Mutuality of Interests

The City's Water Front Plans

The Coming Transportation Shortage

308
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ADDRESS
by
ELISHA LEE
Vice-President
Pennsylvania Railroad

At the Annual Meeting of
The Traffic Club of Baltimore
February 7, 1922

I

OUR MUTUALITY OF INTERESTS

Mr. President, Members and Guests of the Baltimore Traffic Club

I always like to come to Baltimore; partly because this is a beautiful and historic city whose name never fails to call up thoughts of events and traditions which are inseparably associated with so much that is most inspiring and memorable in our country's annals; partly because it is a home of great and expanding industries, one of the nation's leading seaports, the focus of a world-wide commerce, and a traffic center in the foremost rank of importance upon the railroad system with which I am associated.

Therefore, both as an American citizen, keenly interested in our country's future and her past, and as a railroad officer whose most absorbing work must ever be found where transportation problems concentrate, I always experience a sense of pleasurable anticipation when duty or opportunity calls me to this city.

You can readily understand, then, that for personal reasons I was deeply gratified at being honored with the invitation to be here tonight. But I derive a still deeper satisfaction from the fact, which is very much broader in its significance, that you have taken this occasion—the annual meeting of your society—to ask an officer of the Pennsylvania Railroad to address the representatives of so many leading shippers and receivers of freight in the city of Baltimore. I make that statement because this city and the railroad which I represent have immensely valuable and important interests in common, and because the welfare and prosperity of both demand, for the future, an increasing degree of neighborliness and friendship.

I want you to feel that the Management of the Pennsylvania Railroad, in the deepest and most sincere sense of the words, has the industrial, commercial and maritime interests of this city at heart; that our Management believes your prosperity is a vital factor in our prosperity; and that we want to see Baltimore flourish and expand as a market, as a port, and as a productive center.

We want our railroad also to progress and grow as a transportation system, in order that we may keep full pace with your progress; and let me say that is no easy task, as this port and city are going ahead very fast. We hope to make our railroad a real factor in helping to realize the still greater prosperity to which Baltimore is destined and, in so helping, share in the fruits. That is the message I want to get home to you tonight.

Three Basic Reasons

A railroad is not a thing which exists for its own purposes. It is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end, and that end, of course, is the successful rendering of transportation service. In performing this function, a railroad provides employment and the means of livelihood for many thousands of workers, and, what is also important, offers a means by which large amounts of accumulated or saved capital of the people can be put into useful channels of employment, thus benefiting the country as a whole, and at the same time fairly compensating the owners of the capital for its use.

To perform these functions successfully a railroad must in itself be prosperous, and no railroad can prosper unless the territory and communities which it serves also prosper. Otherwise, the sources of its traffic will shrivel and dry up. For these reasons a railroad cannot be said to be intelligently managed, in the truest interests of its owners and working forces, unless it is also managed in the true interests of all the centers which it serves.

Why should the Pennsylvania Railroad want to see Baltimore grow? I have made the assertion that we do, and the question must be regarded as a legitimate one. The answer is simple.

Through our railroad plant here—our right of way, tracks, yards, stations, bridges, piers and water front facilities—we are one of the largest investors in property in Baltimore. That property is valueless unless utilized, and can only reach maximum productivity when fully utilized. That is reason number one.

Another is that we are dependent upon Baltimore for a very large originating and terminating traffic, which contributes in important degree to the life-blood of the entire Pennsylvania System, from its western terminals to the sea.

A third reason is that our railroad is one of the chief taxpayers of the city, as well as of the state of Maryland.

A Stake in Baltimore

All this simply means that in addition to the promptings of natural friendship and neighborly sentiment toward this city, we are moved by the fact that, in the matter of actual dollars and cents, we are one of the heaviest backers of Baltimore and Maryland to win. Circumstances impel us to do everything in our power to insure that this city and state, in which we are such heavy investors, shall go ahead. Naturally, we are delighted with the evidences of sure and broad gauge progress which are here so plainly to be seen.

As witness of our faith in the future of the city and the port, I need only point to the fact that we have lately added to our already great investment here the sum of $6,000,000, expended in giving Baltimore the newest, the

largest and the most modern grain elevator on the Pennsylvania Railroad System.

It may interest you to know that we have in the Baltimore district over 4000 employes; that we pay out here in wages nearly $7,000,000 annually; that we serve the city with 176 passenger trains daily, giving direct through service to practically every point of importance east of the Mississippi, from Boston to Key West and from Chicago to New Orleans; and that last year we delivered to this port nearly 19,000,000 bushels of grain, our largest grain tonnage here since 1916.

In addition, we transported here a very large amount of fuel and other raw materials, besides handling an immense and varied tonnage, both in and outbound, of manufactured articles and merchandise, constituting a very considerable proportion of the city's total domestic and foreign commerce, and contributing in a most important degree to the traffic of our entire railroad system.

Baltimore's Port Advantages

We are proud of our record and hope to merit and achieve greater things in the future as one of the chief carriers of your city's expanding trade.

Baltimore, as a seaport, has certain striking inherent advantages. She is located on one of the finest natural harbors in the world, and that, in turn, opens out into what I think may be called, without fear of contradiction, the most splendid body of landlocked tidewater in the United States—the Chesapeake Bay.

As a water trans-shipment point for our interior products, Baltimore stands in a peculiarly favorable relationship to two of the most important commodities upon which our national wealth depends, namely, grain and coal. In regard to the former, she has, over our System, a direct rail line, with favorable grades, from the two great ports at the eastern ends of the Lakes, Erie and Buffalo, as well as by all-rail from the West. From every point of view, Baltimore is in a natural position always to command a very considerable proportion of our country's export traffic in grain, as well as in other important commodities.

As to the coal trade, it is unnecessary to point out that Baltimore is closer to more centers of coal production than any other seaport; that she is, in fact, surrounded with mines within comparatively short hauls, not only in the mountains of her own state, but also in the adjoining states of Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

These factors naturally tend to make Baltimore a great grain and coal port, and I congratulate the business men of the city upon their wisdom in pushing these and other opportunities so aggressively and vigorously. The best lines of development for any port or any producing center always lie in fostering the opportunities presented by natural advantages, and harmonizing with natural economic law.

II

THE CITY'S WATER-FRONT PLANS

As one of the railroads serving this port, and as the carrier of so generous a proportion of the total traffic of both the city and the state, the Pennsylvania Railroad naturally has the keenest interest in the great and far-reaching plans which are under way for the use of public funds in the improvement and extension of Baltimore's water-front and vessel-handling facilities. Indeed, I think I may go so far as to say that the position of our railroad is such as a great investor and taxpayer in both the city and the state, that we naturally hope to be accorded an opportunity to advise and assist in the formulation of the final plans for these great and important developments which will

mean so much to the port and the transportation systems which serve it.

First, let me say that these projects are of such magnitude, and the expenditures which are contemplated are so large, as to reflect a spirit of enterprise and self-reliance on the part of the people of Maryland and Baltimore, which merit the most unfeigned admiration of the entire country. I wish to offer you the congratulations of the Pennsylvania Railroad upon your courage and the confidence you have shown in the future of your city and in your own capacity as business men.

$50,000,000 For Progress

Foreign trade is vitally necessary to our national welfare, but it is a fiercely competitive field of enterprise. It is not a thing which is likely to come in any very large or satisfying measure to those who wait. It must be reached out for aggressively. Unquestionably, one of the surest ways to begin reaching out, with a good prospect of success, is to start by providing the best possible accommodations for seagoing vessels here at home, and the greatest economies and convenience in effecting the interchange of traffic between rail lines and ships.

The expenditure proposed for the water front of Baltimore amounts to $50,000,000. Owing to the magnitude of our interests in both city and state, and our dependence upon Baltimore for such a large and important share of our traffic, the Pennsylvania Railroad is naturally anxious that no precaution shall be omitted to see that that expenditure is wisely and productively planned, and that the vast undertakings which such a great amount of money makes possible, shall be devised and executed in the spirit of broadest foresight and statesmanship.

There should be but one purpose—to secure from these projects the highest possible degree of helpfulness, benefit and practical utility to the people of Maryland and Baltimore, and to their commercial and industrial enterprises.

Looking at the subject from the broadest possible viewpoint, it seems probable that Baltimore's water-front projects will tend finally to crystallize and develop along one of two quite divergent lines of policy and fundamental purpose. The choice between the two lies, I presume, largely in the hands of the business men of the city, and the decisions involved are so momentous in their consequences and in their bearing upon the future of the port that I cannot refrain from submitting the matter to you, as I see it, for your most thoughtful consideration.

The Alternative Policies

In doing so, I am actuated solely by the hope that I may be able to contribute a little light which shall assist in the guidance of those upon whom advisory responsibility rests regarding the very important question how this large capital sum shall be expended.

One of these two possible lines of policy and purpose would have as its guiding motive the thought that the city is about to create its water-front facilities anew. Logically, this would result in a highly concentrated development, within a limited area, of new facilities wholly integrated and complete in themselves and necessarily of such a character as to compete with, and more or less supersede, some of the already existing facilities, especially those which have been created in past years by the railroads.

There is, perhaps, something alluring in the thought of a clean sweep and a new start, and in the picture of a highly concentrated development, centering all traffic within an elaborately equipped and definitely restricted area, but

practical utility must, of course, be the test of this or any other plan.

The alternative policy would lead to a decentralized and diversified port development, characterized by flexibility rather than concentration, and supplementing and co-ordinating, rather than superseding, the facilities at hand.

Careful Thought Required

It seems to me that very careful thought should be given before the final choice is made, and that the merits or demerits of both policies should be most thoroughly and comprehensively considered.

Take, for instance, the export grain traffic, which is so important to the city and the port of Baltimore. In a time of great activity—and faith in our country's future leaves no doubt in my mind that such times are coming back again—would it be more advantageous to have the grain traffic concentrated at a single waterfront plant, municipally owned or otherwise, or to have it decentralized so that it may be handled at several independent points on the harbor front?

Advocates of a concentrated development might claim for that policy greater efficiency in the actual operation of transferring the grain from cars to boats, and possibly this claim might be substantiated not only in theory but to some degree in practice.

However, those who believe in the other plan, that of diversification, could point to its much greater flexibility and to the fact that in time of congestion the entire port business would not be dependent, for continuous functioning, upon a single facility; also to the fact that a diversified development might be thought better calculated to assist the city in obtaining the maximum volume of service from the three major railroad lines which serve it.

Back in 1916, I recall an occasion on which two of the railroads serving Baltimore had, at their elevators and in transit, a total of 15,000 carloads of export grain for this port. It went through two separate elevator plants and was about equally divided between the rail lines involved. This unprecedented volume of grain was handled with some delay, but, on the whole, satisfactorily.

Suppose it had been destined to a single plant convenient to one road and not to the other. Would better or poorer results have been obtained? Would the movement have been more prompt, or would the congestion probably have been greater and the entire movement slower? Was the fact that one big carrier was competing with another a substantial element in averting disaster? These are questions to be thought over in deciding which type of port development—that is, the concentrated or diversified—should finally be adopted.

Broad Statesmanship Needed

I have one or two thoughts on this matter which I wish to leave with you as an expression of personal belief. I always have been, and still am, an optimist on our country. We are in the middle of a business depression, a very severe one, but it is not going to last forever. Good times are coming back—no one knows how soon, whether it will be in a few months or whether several years will be required to regain our equilibrium. But all of us—merchants, manufacturers, farmers, and railroad managers—have got to look forward to and prepare as best we can for the revival of our commerce, both domestic and foreign.

I venture this prediction: The next time we have an active and satisfactory condition of trade, with a good and profitable market abroad for our surplus products, the hardest problem

before the business men of the United States will not be so much how to take care of their foreign trade at the water fronts of our ports—vital as that unquestionably is—but how to find railroad facilities adequate to handle the movements of commodities and merchandise within boundaries.

I make this statement without any disparagement whatever of the necessity for port improvements, concerning the advisability of which I have not the slightest question, provided only they are planned and executed with wisdom and foresight. I merely wish to call attention to the fact that with the next revival of trade, Baltimore will have the most urgent need of all the railroad facilities which are available to her. Consequently, the best and wisest form of development for her port facilities would seem to be that which will insure to Baltimore the highest practicable degree of utility and service from the railroad lines reaching the city, by co-ordinating all their facilities to the greatest advantage.

From all points of view the conditions are such as to require the most careful weighing of every element involved in formulating the port plans; and I wish to reiterate my hope that all will be done from the standpoint of impartial statesmanship, for the good of the city and the state and their business enterprises, and in complete freedom from any narrowing or selfish influences, if such by any chance exist. That has been the sole purpose I have had in mind in what I have said regarding this subject.

III

THE COMING TRANSPORTATION SHORTAGE

I wish to add a few words on the railroad situation in general. Just now the topic uppermost in nearly all discussions is rates. Right there I think some of the business men of the United States are making a very serious mistake and are losing sight of a vastly more important fact, the most important, indeed, in the whole railroad problem.

That fact is that as soon as business revives to any normal degree, we are going to be confronted with a country-wide and very serious shortage of transportation facilities. And if the revival is a real one, the shortage and the resulting congestion are quite likely to be the most severe and harmful in our history.

When Trade Revival Comes

Don't be misled by conditions just at present existing, because the present is a very abnormal, and in all human likelihood temporary, situation. It is true that right now there are not only enough railroad facilities in the country, but a very large surplus, for the traffic moving at the moment. This state of affairs is simply due to the fact that we have had an unprecedented collapse in the volume of traffic, as the quite natural aftermath of the remarkable boom which came to us during the war. In point of view of traffic moving now, we have gotten back below the level of 1914.

When we recover, which we are surely going to do, unless the whole world goes over to the Bolsheviki, the existing slack will be taken up in short order and before long shippers will again be a great deal more troubled about embargoes than about rates.

The capacity of our railroads for handling commercial traffic with reasonable expedition was reached and passed in the year 1915. In this country, as you know, railroad traffic normally doubles about once every ten or twelve years. We have not greatly increased our traffic handling capacity since 1915. Indeed, in some respects, we have been going backward. In each of the last five years, for

instance, the number of miles of line operated in the United States has actually decreased.

This situation gives some idea of where we can expect to be when trade gets over the oscillations caused by the war and settles down into its natural path of progress. We are going to have an insufficiency of transportation. Every railroad manager realizes it, and business men and shippers in their own self-interest ought to grasp the fact also.

I have no intention of attempting to discuss in detail the causes for this situation. They have included a very long period of too much regulation and wrong theories about the purposes and scope of regulation. It was apparently quite generally believed, by the regulative bodies, that cheapness of service was a more necessary quality than excellence of service. It was supposed that the lowest possible rate per ton per mile was more to be sought after than development in the art of transportation.

Go Slowly on Rates

Among those who controlled our political destinies there were apparently many who thought—perhaps with perfect sincerity, however erroneously—that it was more important to prevent any railroad company from accumulating wealth than it was to insure that the railroad industry as a whole should be solvent, prosperous and progressive.

The injury has been done. We cannot undo the past, but we can learn from it and set about rectifying our errors in the future. I think the business men of America are a unit now in realizing that railroads must be financially sound and prosperous, and in desiring a national railroad policy which will insure, as quickly as possible, the attainment of the necessary degree of prosperity for the years to come. Meantime, however, it seems inevitable that we shall have to go through a period in which our facilities will be inadequate, before the existing deficiencies can be repaired.

Under these circumstances I wish to commend to you, and to all business men, the wisdom of going slowly on the rate question. I am not going to try to prove that existing rates are all right. I am perfectly willing to concede that some should be lowered as soon as that can be safely done. But it is very necessary to prepare the way properly in advance, and it is against hasty and ill-considered action that I wish to caution you.

Business Principles Needed

Existing rates may be an inconvenience, but they are not prohibitive, and in all probability their restrictive effect has been considerably exaggerated. On the other hand, there can be no question as to the harm which would result to the country as a whole from any widespread visitation of financial difficulties upon the railroads. That would be a calamity of the first magnitude. And I leave it to you to judge whether it is not better to be patient for a time in the matter of rates, than to risk such a catastrophe.

So, give the railroads a chance by not pressing too hard in the matter of rates and by letting the orderly readjustments which have been going on take their course.

Beyond that, in the interests of better railroading, use your influence, as business men, toward the adoption of a national policy which will permit the railroads to be run and operated as business enterprises. As a fundamental necessity in bringing about that condition, let your voices be heard for the restoration to railroad managers of the powers and functions of management.

Then, with a spirit of regulation, which recognizes that encouragement of railroad

enterprise is one of its fundamental duties, we can count upon a restoration of the railroad industry to that position of progress and leadership in our national life which it once occupied and from which it should never have been displaced.

* * * *

Gentlemen, I wish to thank you, both personally and as an officer of the Pennsylvania Railroad, for this opportunity of meeting and speaking to such a representative gathering of the business men of Baltimore. The spirit which prompted the invitation to be here, and which has so happily prevailed tonight, admirably reflects the friendly community of interest naturally existing between a great commercial city and a railroad by which so much of its commerce is borne. It is my hope that that relationship, and the sentiments which accompany it, will continue to increase in strength and firmness as the years go by.

You have accomplished great things in the past in the fields of industry and domestic and foreign trade, and are planning far vaster achievements for the future. The Management of the Pennsylvania Railroad trusts that in all of your plans you will regard its facilities and equipment as instruments always ready to serve your purpose, and that you will look upon our railroad as being in the truest sense a partner in the success of all your enterprises.

EDITORIAL DISCUSSION

PLANNING BALTIMORE HARBOR

Baltimore "News," February 9, 1922

Mr. Lee, approaching the question of port improvement from the point of view of the Pennsylvania Railroad, leaves one with a sense of the extreme intricacy of harbor development and the far-reaching consequences of what might seem to be unimportant decisions. It is impossible to plan the port as if we were operating on virgin ground; it is equally impossible to plan as if the completed project would be the end of the story. Any scheme for port development can only be looked upon as one chapter; it is determined by what has gone before, and will itself determine the direction of more that will come later.

Hence there is the necessity for striking a balance between the two possible ways of approaching the problem. As Mr. Lee points out, port development can be based either upon the idea of making the best possible use of existing facilities or of striking out a new and complete system, which, while better in itself, would result in the loss of what we already have. It is obvious that neither way can be pushed to an extreme; the problem is to work the old facilities into the plans for the new ones, so that existing equipment will not be thrown away, at the same time that the subsequent development will be along the most satisfactory lines.

The Port Commission has an especially difficult task from the formation of Baltimore harbor, which is divided into two general sections by the upper harbor and the Patapsco. The Pennsylvania terminals are alone on the east side; both the Baltimore and Ohio and the Western Maryland come to tidewater on the western side. A project embracing both sides of the harbor would be too ambitious for the expected traffic, and the Port Commission has therefore turned its attention to the western side, where there is more room both for wharves and for railroad yards. If the whole port could be built over from the ground up, all the roads and wharves would probably be concentrated in the western side of the harbor and the southwestern sections of the city. That would give us a better harbor and port than the present divided one; but the existing facilities of the Pennsylvania cannot now be left out of account, and hence it is necessary to combine the development of the more suitable western side with the plant already in existence on the eastern side.

In striking the compromise, the Port Commission has planned to build its new piers and terminals at McComas

Street and the Mud Islands and connect the Pennsylvania yards by means of the belt line. Mr. Lee was entirely right if he intended to intimate that the belt line must be a real connecting link, of sufficient capacity to enable the city to make full use of the Pennsylvania. Unless the belt line is fully developed there will be the possibility of tremendous congestion in moving the important amount of freight for the territory served by the Pennsylvania from the piers on the west to the rail terminals on the east, and vice versa. We shall have to accept the prospect of a real freight railroad running around the head of the harbor, and this will have to be one of the basic features of the whole plan.

PORT DEVELOPMENT AND THE RAILROADS

Baltimore "Sun," February 9, 1922

Speaking as a railroad man, Vice-President Lee of the Pennsylvania Railroad asked, in effect, that Baltimore's port should be developed in such a way as to facilitate the loading of goods from the interior of the United States and the unloading from ships to cars of goods destined for that territory, and further, that the development shall be for the general benefit of all railroads. The first contention is of such obvious soundness as to be beyond argument and the Port Development Commission has fully stressed its importance, but the second is worthy of thought.

Does Mr. Lee imply that the Pennsylvania Railroad is not altogether pleased with the city's tentative plans that look to the construction of docks and warehouses along the Middle Branch, where the Baltimore and Ohio and the Western Maryland have their terminals? Does he think that arrangements cannot be made by which the Pennsylvania will be able to obtain its share of traffic to and from the piers which the commission proposes for McComas Street and the Mud Islands? If so, he has properly emphasized the need of solving this feature of the general port problem.

The municipal belt-line railroad is designed as a connecting link between Baltimore's through lines. Its capacity and the cost of operating it are still matters of discussion, so that one hesitates to adopt a dogmatic attitude regarding it in its present form; but the experience of other ports has shown that such intra-city lines can be invaluable in giving what Mr. Lee calls "the highest degree of practicable utility and service from the railroad lines reaching the city." Does the solution of Mr. Lee's supposititious problem lie in making the municipal railroad all it should be—an adequate means for providing prompt and inexpensive transfers of freight along the water front? Whether this is the case or not, the Port Development Commission may well devote serious thought to the problem of co-ordinating the port facilities, in addition to discussing the propriety of building docks on Locust Point. Certainly the city cannot afford to develop its port in a way which will prevent it from utilizing to the full the services of one of its most important carriers.

REPLY FROM MR. LEE

Philadelphia, February 11, 1922.

Editor Baltimore "Sun,"

Dear Sir:

I have read with a great deal of interest your editorial of February 9th, entitled "Port Development and the Railroads," in which you discuss my remarks of the previous evening before the Traffic Club. I observe that you refer to me as having advocated that the proposed port plans should be formulated "for the general benefit of all railroads." That was not exactly my thought. What I said to the Traffic Club was that the proposed expenditures ought to be planned with the purpose of insuring the greatest possible benefit to the people and business interests of Baltimore and Maryland; and I endeavored to point out that, in my opinion, this would necessarily imply planning the harbor-front improvements with a view to securing, from all railroads reaching the port, the best and most expeditious service which they are capable of giving.

My hope was to start the business men of the city thinking about what general scheme of port development would be best adapted to that end. For this reason I did not attempt to express any personal views as to specific details. Nor did I think the occasion was one to attempt an analysis or criticism of any existing plans, because, so far as the information reaching us indicates, they are to be regarded as still tentative and incomplete. Criticisms which might perhaps be warranted if these plans were to be taken as final and as definitely limiting the scope of the proposed improvements, might be shown, in the light of future developments, to be groundless; hence I refrained from the attempt.

I had only one thought in my talk, and that was to impress upon the business men of Baltimore the fact that the port development question is essentially a transportation problem; that Baltimore, in the era of greater foreign trade activity for which its business

interests are planning, will have to make the most out of every line of railroad transportation available to it; and that, therefore, the port development plans should have, as a fundamental purpose, the utilization, to the maximum extent, of every railroad system reaching the city's water front. This is really the vital problem to be solved in planning these improvements.

It seems to me that the Municipal Belt Railroad is an admirable facility for reaching the various plants, industries, warehouses, and other business establishments of the city which are accessible to it. For traffic originating and terminating in Baltimore, it serves an admirable purpose. For the handling of the export traffic, however, what is chiefly needed is directness of access from the railroads to the piers. Export freight is largely heavy volume traffic, much of it commodities moving in bulk, and for its efficient handling at the water front, facilities providing great flexibility and simplicity of train and car movements are prime essentials.

Therefore, before proceeding with the consummation of any scheme of development which would leave any railroad dependent upon the Municipal Belt Railway for access to the new piers, I suggest that the feasibility and practicability of the Municipal Belt Railway for handling the heavy volume of this form of traffic be carefully inquired into or reviewed, as a necessary precautionary measure, prior to finally committing the city, or entering upon actual expenditure.

Very truly yours,

ELISHA LEE.

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